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Casey is praised at CIA ceremony

By Saul Friedman
Inquirer Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Spies and other assorted secret agents and their secretaries came out into the warm for an unusual, semi-public ceremony yesterday at which President Reagan praised the CIA and its embattled chief, William J. Casey, as "the eyes and ears of the free world."

Lauding Casey for improving the management of the CIA, Reagan told its employees assembled for the ground-breaking of a \$190 million addition to the agency's building, "Your work, the work of your director, the other top officials have been an inspiration to your fellow Americans and to people everywhere."

Despite the top-secret security clearance of his audience, the President was accompanied by at least eight Secret Service agents as he strode to the sun-drenched platform set up on a grassy knoll behind the agency headquarters at Langley, Va.

His remarks seemed less than a personal endorsement of Casey, who has been accused of funneling stolen papers from Jimmy Carter's White House to President Reagan's 1980 campaign. Casey was Reagan's campaign manager.

And White House chief of staff James A. Baker 3d, who has sworn that he received such materials from Casey in 1980, did not accompany Reagan, although he ordinarily does so.

But deputy White House press secretary Larry Speakes said after the ceremony that Reagan's remarks were "an endorsement of the role of the CIA and the role of the director" and that the President continued to have confidence in Casey.

Speakes said he knew of no discussion between the President and Casey at the ceremony about a House subcommittee report released Wednesday that included the accusations against Casey. And Speakes said he knew of no plans for Casey to resign.

Casey, who has said he does not recall handling the Carter campaign

papers and has contradicted Baker's recollection, told reporters at the ceremony that he had not yet read the subcommittee report and reserved comment on it.

Even if that controversy had not brought drama to the ceremony, the scene itself was unusual. Employees and officials of the super-secret agency rarely assemble when cameras and tape recorders are around. And rarely are the photographers, television cameras and reporters of the White House press corps admitted to the agency grounds.

Indeed, the CIA insisted that no foreign reporters and only White House reporters who were U.S. citizens be admitted. Even so, there was a delay in admittance, and Art McNeill, a CIA public affairs officer, apologized: "We are unaccustomed to welcoming people to our compound."

He asked that cameras, ordinarily banned from the sprawling grounds, refrain from taking close-ups of agency personnel — looking much like bureaucrats anywhere in Washington — who streamed out of their offices to attend the late-morning ceremony.

And the employees were told to shed their identification badges, lest their names be seen by strangers.

For all that, Secret Service agents peered into the woods at the edge of the ceremony area. And despite their clearances or previous service, the officials, agents and other employees of the CIA, and former directors Richard Helms, James Schlesinger and William Colby, lined up to go through the metal detectors that follow the President to every public appearance.

The President stressed in his speech that the agency's secrets need to be maintained, "even in this, the most open and free country on Earth."

He then warned of the danger of losing them "through unauthorized and illegal disclosures of classified information" by federal officials, which he denounced as "improper, unethical and plain wrong."

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